Lee R. Minnick
Yesteryear Museum
20 Harriet Drive
Whippant, NJ 07981- 1906

6/7/92

Dear Mr. Minnick,

Your request for information about Arthur Godfrey, his broadcast colleagues and his private life in this morning's Book World reminds me....

"The old red-head," if I remember correctly what he called himself in his earliest radio day, and his theme song, which he sang, "And They Cut Down the Old Pine Tree," was far and away the most popular program at least on Saturday nights in those pre-TV days, when he was on CBS WJSV, later WTOP. (Nights I heard it on New England and in Florida in those days.)

You refer to his "home in Leesburg." As he prospered he bought a farm outside Leesburg. He raised exotic animals on it. I recall llama. He enjoyed them and he talked about them.

Years later when I had a poultry farm and delivered my own products to the consumer, one of my regular customers was named Burros. She was, I think, the widow of a Spaniard, Peter (?) Burros, who founded an excellent Washington restaurant, the Madrillion. She was the secretary of "Scoop" Russell, an NBC vice president. Their office was in either the Commonwealth or the Heurick Building on the north side of K Street, NW, between 16 and 17. Russell was an occasional customer.

Russell was among those who used my individual-serving chicken of high quality that later came to be known as Rock Cornish Game Hens as Xmas presents. Not taint of influence attached to such gifts. I was among the first to specilize in that item, which then was not readily available in most stores. That was 1960-2, that approximate time.

One year he told me he had a problem finding something different for Godfrey, who was with a competitor but was a close friend. Or perhaps he'd heard that I had a rare duck that Eisenhower prized and raised on his Gettysburg farm. However he heard of it he asked me for some of them for Godfrey and he asked for delivery of the live fowl.

These ducks were a domesticated mallard that could not fly much, developed near Rouen, France, and known as le canard de Rouen.

One of my male ducks threw a sport, a topknot of colorful feathers. They were attractive so I bred that sport in. Thta is what Eisenhower got and what Russell wanted for Godfrey.

And Godfrey said he just loved! He and Ike then alone other than I had them.

And Godfrey liked that, too.

A story about the WJSV call letters WJSV. That I do not for a minute believe.

The most popular WJSV Sunday -morning program was the hour-long 6 a.m. one by a black man from the Virginia Tidewater who had a third-grade education and called himself The

Reverend Lightfoot Solomon Michaud. I think he called his church the Church of God. I know it was in northwest Georgia Avenue, on the west side, opposite the old Griffith Stadium home of the Washington Senators and the Redskins.

He had a good thing going and it made him at least moderately wealthy because when I interviewed him in about 1930 he had a mansion, of what had been one in its earlier life, on the south side of R St., NW, closer to 17th than to 18th.

In that interview he told me that the station's call-letters came from him or his program and stood for Willingly Jesus Suffered for Victory."

If he said that on the air I suppose that could have been enough to prompt the change in call letters to WTOP because the frequency was then the "top" of the dial for AM then, in frequency rather than wave length.

This man with the early-morning broadcast after Godfrey's late-night one was a natural Barnum. He staged, for example, a mass marriage after a couple of sermons, "That Man You Live With Is Not Your Husband" and "That Woman You Live With Is Not Your Wife."

Then all those he reached or scared or persuaded went to his hitch-day spectacular and they were all married in a mass ceremony.

Godfrey was in those early days of his career perhaps the most popular personality in Washington radio.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg